

# A Critical Analysis of the Relevance of Gandhian Ideology to the Present Society

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**Ideological struggle, dogmatic conflict and philosophical wars:** Today battles are fought in the fields of propaganda, domains of campaigning and spheres of demonstration. Even, in the just-past history of 50-100 years, such interpretative discourses, critical assessments and forced evaluations mislead the current generation. Many times, the writings of Gandhi are turned against him, as his life has been an “open book”. When “the relevance of Gandhian ideology to the present society” is deliberated at different Universities and colleges, it is disparaged, degraded and denigrated by the intellectuals! He is portrayed as anti-dalit, casteist, racist, British agent, womanizer, the ‘first corporate sponsored NGO of this country’ and so on<sup>1</sup> and thus, such ramblings have been trying to reduce him to some sort of less than Mahatma or not Mahatma at all! And Gandhi’s great-grand son has to defend him<sup>2</sup>. The youth of the day are carried away by the exiting talks, emotional appeals and garrulous ramblings. It is evident that biased ideology, prejudiced dogma and spirited doctrine work willfully to attack Gandhi by all means. In the presentation of fact and fantasy; history and mythistory; reality and myth; many times, truth is camouflaged with such fantasies and therefore, even researcher has to remove chaff from the grain to access fact. Thus, Gandhi, Gandhism, Gandhian ideals, Gandhian ideology etc., have been expounded, exposed and explained ideologically. Here, in this paper, only few examples are taken to drive out the point tackling the issue directly.

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<sup>1</sup> Aruntathi Roy wrote in English dailies about Gandhi under the guise of equality, rights and other bogies, but, evidently with an intent to attack Gandhi.

Roy, Arundhati. ***Doctor and the Saint: Ambedkar, Gandhi and the Battle Against Caste***, *The Caravan. Journal of Politics and Culture* (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. ***Response to Arundhati Roy***. in *Economic & Political Weekly* 50.30 (2015): 83.

**Why popular writers attack Gandhi?**: Arundhati Roy stirred a controversy, in 2015, when she called Mahatma Gandhi as the ‘first corporate sponsored NGO of this country.’ She has been making controversial statements on Kashmir, when, Gandhians fought for independence. She even went a step further and added ‘it was one of the greatest falsehoods in this country to worship him (Gandhi) who wrote horrible things about Dalit, women and poor.’ She claimed<sup>3</sup> that she made the comments based on the writings of Gandhi between 1990 to 1946. Columnists like Hasan Suroor<sup>4</sup> supported rabble rousing books with comments, “*An explosive new book portraying Gandhi as a rabid racist and an unashamed flag-bearer for the British Empire has provoked a heated debate, pitting his admirers against his critics, even before it is out*”. Incidentally, he has been booked in London for his pedophile activities. The book picked up sentences here and there and tried to prove Gandhi was a racist and hence Einstein and Nelson Mandela would not have praised him, had they known the utterances of Gandhi<sup>5</sup>. Ironically or otherwise, this was picked up by foreign media and started circulating<sup>6</sup>.

**Half-naked seditious fakir (1931)**: Criticism of Gandhi, Gandhian ideals and ideology started during the British period itself by many statesmen, religious heads, scholars and ideologists all over the world<sup>7</sup>. In 1931 itself, Winston Churchill addressing the Council of the West Essex Unionist Association on February 23, 1931 said<sup>8</sup>, “*It is*

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<sup>3</sup> The Hindustan Times, **Mahatma Gandhi was first corporate sponsored NGO of the country: Arundhati Roy**, Abdul Jadid, Gorakhpur, Updated: Mar 22, 2015 11:53 IST.

<http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/mahatma-gandhi-was-first-corporate-sponsored-ngo-of-the-country-arundhati-roy/story-05TbhsejVr6VfdFT9uoPBI.html>

<sup>4</sup> Hasan Suroor, **Gandhiji was a racist, says new book endorsed by Arundhati Roy**, in the Firstpost, Sep 7, 2015 13:10 IST.

<http://www.firstpost.com/india/the-racism-of-the-mahatma-gandhis-years-in-south-africa-in-focus-thanks-to-new-book-2423502.html>;

<sup>5</sup> Ashwin Desai and Goolam Vahed, **The South African Gandhi - Stretcher-Bearer of Empire**, Narayana Publishers, 2015.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/09/03/what-did-mahatma-gandhi-think-of-black-people/>; This You tube produced by Narayana Publishers contains the picked up sentences of Gandhi, reportedly mentioned in the South African context - <https://youtu.be/bZn2TW2vdhM>;

<sup>7</sup> Edwardes, Michael. **The myth of the Mahatma: Gandhi, the British and the Raj**, Constable, 1986.

<sup>8</sup> R. K. Prabhu (Compiler), **This was Bapu**, Navajivan Mudranalaya, Ahmadebad, 1954, p.144.

*alarming and also nauseating to see Mr. Gandhi, an Inner Temple lawyer, now become a seditious fakir of a type well known in the East, striding half-naked up the steps of the Viceroyal Palace, while he is still organizing and conducting a defiant campaign of civil disobedience, to parley on equal terms with the representative of the King-Emperor.”* He had also thundered: ***“I am against these conversations and agreements between Lord Irwin and Mr. Gandhi. . . The truth is that Gandhi-ism and all it stands for will have to be grappled with and finally crushed.”*** Whether Gandhism was crushed or not, he could not have seen the consequences. His sarcasm filled with superiority and hatred are revealed through the expressions used – Inner Temple Lawyer, Seditious fakir, Striding half-naked, conducting defiant campaign, parley on equal terms, etc. As a Whiteman, perhaps, he hated him as a “black man” or “brown man”, to be treated equal as a Britain.

Of course, later in July 1944, Gandhi responded to Churchill through a letter saying<sup>9</sup>, ***“Dear Prime Minister, You are reported to have a desire to crush the simple ‘naked fakir’ as you are said to have described me. I have been long trying to be a fakir and that [too] naked – a more difficult task. I, therefore, regard the expression as a compliment though unintended. I approach you then as such and ask you to trust and use me for the sake of your people and mine and through them those of the world.”*** In London to attend the Round Table Conference, Gandhi wanted to meet Churchill but the latter had refused to see him, though his son Randolph met Gandhi<sup>10</sup>. Churchill met Jinnah in December 1946, but, he never met Gandhi or Ambedkar. Thus, when Jinnah became “father of Pakistan”, Churchill “uncle”, as pointed out by one writer<sup>11</sup>. So, when Indians of various categories participated in three Round Table Conferences (TRC) that taken place during 1930-32, their responses could have been in the same way<sup>12</sup>. Ironically, the

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<sup>9</sup> Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi(New Delhi: Publications Division), Vol.77, pp.391-92.

<sup>10</sup> Tandon, Vishwanath, ***Mahatma Gandhi and Winston Churchill: Some Peeps into their Relations***, in Gandhi Marg, Volume 35 Number 2, July–September 2013.

<sup>11</sup> Alex von Tunzelmann, ***Indian Summer: The Secret History of the End of an Empire***, Simon & Schuster UK Ltd, London, 2007.

<sup>12</sup> Here, a Christian opinion has been expressed that dissented the equal pacing of all believers at the Round Table, as only Jesus could sit with equals.

Michael G. Cartwright (Edited by), ***Exploring Christian Mission Beyond Christendom: United Methodist Perspectives***, University of Indianapolis Press, USA, 2010, pp.55-56.

RTCs paved way for Communal Award (1932) and Pakistan (1947) dividing India on caste and communal lines. And Churchill considered Gandhi as enemy of British empire<sup>13</sup>.

**The World Wars and the British dealing with India:** Definitely, when the west was experimenting with new ideologies, weaponry and hatred in the World Wars I (1914-18) and II (1939-45), India was experiencing different ideology, non-violence and reconciliation. Indian soldiers participated in the Wars and get martyred also fighting for the British! The rulers at London understood the valor of the Indian soldiers, and anticipated the event of the native Indian soldiers fighting against them. Thus, the rebellions and mutinies were suppressed. In whatever way or capacity or exigency, the British decided to leave India during the period 1945-47 and the Indians got Independence on 15-08-1947, of course, leaving the violent track of partition on communal basis. Gandhi's adversaries were confronting him with different ideologies and therefore, Gandhi had to evolve his own ideology to counter all, besides his engagement with various political social and religious groups.

**How Mohammedans confronted Mahatma with their ideology:** The ideologists have begun their analysis under "myth and reality" aspects. That the appellation of "Mahathma", was never accepted by the orthodox and fundamental Mohammedans, is revealed through the utterances of Ali brothers. Jinnah challenged him with his Muslim separatism to fight for "Pakistan". In 1924, Mohammed Ali to whom Gandhi showed such affection said<sup>14</sup>, *"However pure Mr. Gandhi's character may be, he must appear to me, from the point of religion, inferior to any Mussalman even though he be without character."* In 1925 he emphasized<sup>15</sup>: *"Yes, according to my religion and creed, I do hold an adulterous and a fallen Mussalman to be better than Mr. Gandhi"*. His son Harilal (1888-1948) converted to Islam named himself Abdullah Gandhi bothered him much with his activities. In June 1935, Mahatma Gandhi wrote letters to Harilal, accusing him of raping his own daughter starting before she was eight years old. He also

<sup>13</sup> Valentin, Sonia. "Gandhi: Saint or Sinner?." *Distinctions: An Honors Student Journal* (2006): 40.

<sup>14</sup> Gandhi, Rajmohan. ***Understanding the Muslim mind***. Penguin Books India, 2003, pp.109-110. His son converted to Islam bothered him much with his activities.

<sup>15</sup> B. R. Ambedkar, ***Pakistan or Partition of India***, Thacker and Co., Bombay, 1941, p.302.

urged him to give up "alcohol and debauchery". In the letters, Mahatma Gandhi stated that Harilal's problems were more difficult for him to deal with than the struggle for Indian republic. Jinnah broke with Gandhi to create Pakistan. Thus, Mohammedans challenged Gandhi in his life by all means defeating his compromising ideology.

**Vatican ideology confronted Gandhi (December 1931):** Vatican was observing Gandhian methods of dealing political, social and religious issues<sup>16</sup>. When Gandhi visited Vatican on December 12, 1931, the Pope Pius XI refused to meet him and the Vatican press scorned Gandhi's visit at the time. Gandhi recorded in his diary as follows<sup>17</sup>: *"Arrived in Rome at 8.30 in the morning. Received letter to the effect that the Pope could not receive me. Three of us stayed with General Morris, the others in a hotel. Went to see the Vatican [Museums] in the afternoon. At 6 o'clock Mussolini."* Peter Gonsalves notes<sup>18</sup>, *"The Pope refused to meet him because he was improperly dressed." Living and working in Rome, I decided to cease the opportunity to explore the truth of this statement. On studying the facts in the Vatican's Secret Archives and Roman libraries, I came across three important details that had gone unreported by popular news stories on Gandhi's visit: first, the untimely nature of Gandhi's request (at the moment when the Pope was wedged between Italian fascism on the one hand and British imperialism on the other); second, Gandhi's seemingly naïve acceptance of Mussolini's invitation for an informal chat (that would cause a delay in India's Independence by a decade); third, the personal esteem that Pius XI had for Gandhi (permitting the publication of an article praising him in the Osservato Romano barely two weeks before Gandhi's arrival in Rome)." In fact, not once, but twice Pope refused to meet as pointed out by other researchers<sup>19</sup>. Thus, though, Christian apologists would interpret to the extent that Gandhi was a "crypto Christian" and so on, but, they have maintained their stand of criticizing Gandhi.*

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<sup>16</sup> Prayer, Mario. *The Vatican Church and Mahatma Gandhi's India, 1920-1948*, Social Scientist (2009): 39-63.

<sup>17</sup> Gandhi's diary entry of Saturday 12, 1931, *Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 48, 1958-1984, p. 466. (Henceforth CWMG).

<sup>18</sup> Peter Gonsalves, *Gandhi and the Popes*,

<sup>19</sup> Johnson, Richard L., ed. *Gandhi's experiments with truth: essential writings by and about Mahatma Gandhi*. Lexington Books, 2005, p.282.

**Gandhi sleeping naked with women:** Gandhi has been criticized that he was not a good husband, as he treated his wife Kasturiba very badly. Then, came the other allegations that he slept with women naked and so on. Stanley Wolpert has started campaign of maligning Gandhi with his own interpretation of negative evidences through his books. Thus, the usual writing would be of the sort, that “*On the controversial topic of Gandhi’s experiments with girls, Wolpert is groping in the dark unable to grasp the spiritual and psychological connotations of such experiments. One would have to believe that Gandhi never had any physical relations with any of his female disciples because none of the historians have made any indication on the contrary. In Manus (one of the girls with whom he slept) book on Gandhi too she considered him only as her own ‘Mother’*” and so on<sup>20</sup>. Many times, Gandhi’s words are taken to criticize him<sup>21</sup>. To quote the relevant lines<sup>22</sup>, “Gandhi's typist and shorthand secretary, Parasuram, resigned on New Year's day 1947. He was shocked to find Gandhi sleeping naked with Manu. She also bathed and massaged his naked body, finding nothing wrong in doing anything Bapu asked of her. Gandhi insisted that he was never aroused when he slept beside her, or next to Sushila or Abha.” In fact, these narratives had been there in Gandhian writings themselves and the 88-years old Gandhi never affected by the acts on whatsoever or the women who attended to him. This is picked up now by the criticizers just to malign him.

**How Ambedkar defied Gandhi:** In Maharastra, unfortunately, Ambedkar and Gandhi were interpreted differently during 1930s and 40s and such interpretations continue even today. Thus, a “dalit” interpretation has always been harsh without realizing the reality<sup>23</sup>. Of course, at that time the word “dalit” was not used. Mark Shepherd has started defending Mahathma explaining the nuances of ideology<sup>24</sup>. Arundhati Roy, described the generally accepted image of Gandhi as a lie speaking at

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<sup>20</sup> Wolpert, Stanley A. **Gandhi's passion: The life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi**, Oxford University Press, 2002.

<sup>21</sup> Gupta, Dipankar. **Gandhi before Habermas: the democratic consequences of Ahimsa**, *Economic and Political Weekly* (2009): 27-33.

<sup>22</sup> Wolpert, Stanley A. **Gandhi's passion: The life and legacy of Mahatma Gandhi**, Oxford University Press, 2002, p.227.

<sup>23</sup> Huq, Fazlul. **Gandhi, saint or sinner?**. Dalit Sahitya Akademy, 1992.

<sup>24</sup> Shepard, Mark. **Mahatma Gandhi and His Myths: Civil Disobedience, Nonviolence, and Satyagraha in the Real World** (Plus Why It's Gandhi, Not Ghandi'). Simple Productions, 2002.

Kerala University, Thiruvananthapuram and observed that *"It is time to unveil a few truths about a person whose doctrine of nonviolence was based on the acceptance of a most brutal social hierarchy ever known, the caste system ... Do we really need to name our universities after him?"*. Roy recently wrote a new introduction to Ambedkar's undelivered 1936 speech, The Annihilation of Caste, in which she called Gandhi "the saint of the status quo". The Marxist and other Communist ideologists bring all negative factors, in more subtele way of balancing the imbalances of criticism to criticize<sup>25</sup>. Whatever purpose, purport and motives are implied, imported and introduced, the recent historical facts prove who fought for what at the behest of sacrificing life and wht happened to India with their activities.

**Ambedkar and Gandhi – close encounters (1947-48)**: The politically ambititous Ambedkar appeared to have come closer to the national leaders during the period from 15-08-1947 to 30-01-1948 and it resulted in an unexpected and remarkable rapprochement between Gandhi and Ambedkar. PM Nehru and DPM Patel were party to this accord, which resulted in Ambedkar's entry into free India's first cabinet and his leadership of the Constitution-drafting process, resulting in the 1950 Constitution<sup>26</sup>, *"It was on Gandhi's initiative that Ambedkar was made the Minister of Law, Government of India and subsequently as the Chairman of the Drafting Committee of the Constituent Assembly."* However, in 1951 Ambedkar resigned from the cabinet due to the differences arose in the case of Hindu Code Bill. This also implies that after Gandhi, there was no Congress leader to reconcile with Ambedkar. Or none thought as to how Nehru could not do anything. Hardly in six months, what transpired between two is not known, but, Ambedkar was not satisfied with the Congress, as in the 1952 elections, and again in a by-election in 1954, he contested opposing the Congress, but lost on both occasions. Thus, politically, he lost the battle completely. Between, 1954 and 1956, he was struggling to oppose Congress by all means to find a method. However, on 14-10-1956 he embraced to Buddhism and on 06-12-1956, he died. This is also interpreted differently, as if he wanted to embrace Christianity, Islam and so on, but that Ambedkar

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<sup>25</sup> Lal, Vinay. *The Gandhi everyone loves to Hate*, Economic and Political Weekly (2008): 55-64.

<sup>26</sup> Chandrashakhar Dharmadhikhar, *Contemplating Gandhi – Essays om Mahathma's life and thought*, Institute of Gandhian Studies, Wardha, 2014, p.11

had chosen Buddhism proved that he had done justification to the Constitution of India, as per the provisions of Article 25. But, after the death of both leaders, again, they are pitted against each other, without going into the facts.

**Why national leaders are pitted against each other after their death?:** Like Ambedkar and Jinnah, many other leaders had differences of opinion with Gandhi. Even Dravidian ideologue E.V. Ramasamai Naicker joined them in 1940 to oppose Gandhi to divide nation into three<sup>27</sup>. Very often, Netaji and Sardar Patel are compared for certain acts carried on during the freedom struggle against the British. Bardoli Satyagraha and Chauri chaura incidences were interpreted differently<sup>28</sup>. The partition, killing of millions of people crossing the borders at the time of independence, Gandhi's fasting for various issues during 1947-48 have become topics of discussion, debate and argument, depending upon the point of view, one takes. This has led to the debate of non-violence / ahimsa and violence / himsa qualities involved in the struggles of mass movement. The British might have applied their tactics of “divide and rule”, yet, the freedom obtained by India is credited mostly to Gandhi for obvious reasons. It is not to belittle the work done, sacrifice and martyrdom of others. Thus, after independence blaming or praising exclusively any freedom fighter, congress or non-congress leader and nationalist would not be a judicious act. Ideologically oriented media persons, party line propagandists and sophisticated journalists could bring out such controversies under the guise of any issue. Unbiased, unprejudiced and balanced views based on facts, founded on specific details and rooted in essentials, instead of mere interpretation, biased exposition and forceful conclusion with selective quoting and citing lines and passages.

**The critics really want Gandhi and Gandhian ideology:** Had Gandhi not been there in India, what would have been the condition of India, Indians and anti-Gandhi

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<sup>27</sup> K. V. Ramakrishna Rao, *The Historic Meeting of Jinnah, Periyar and Ambedkar*, A paper presented during the 21st session of South Indian History Congress held at Madurai Kamaraj University from 18 to 20 January 2001 and published in the proceedings, pp.128-136.

<sup>28</sup> Dhanagare, D. N. *Myth and reality in the Bardoli Satyagraha-1928: a study in Gandhian politics*, *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 26.2 (1980): 265-278.



campaigners? Even today, one cannot imagine such situation, as Gandhi’s influence has not been erased completely, but, affecting the Indian society. The concept of ahimsa, non-violence, tolerance and other virtues could be understood only by his experiments with truth that are liked or hated by the followers or detractors of different categories. All wanted and even today want that Gandhi must have been 100% perfect human being and even beyond on the earth. A faithful husband, holy father, obedient son, advantageous brother, compromising politician, good Hindu, devoted Christian, reliable Mohammedan and so on! However, the expected categories of all sorts – ideologists, adversaries, critics never expected that they should have been at least half of such standards. Yet, they have chosen to criticize, defame and even blaspheme with varieties of interpretations. This clearly proves that they have great belief in Gandhian ideals. The critics could only blame Gandhi, as they could not do better than Gandhi in any aspect of issues cropping up today. It is always easy to censure than understand the difficulties in standing up for values, maintaining ethics and dying for morality. The critiques could vent out their feelings through despondency, dejection, desperation, hopelessness and frustration in different ways, but, without reason, such outbursts could only expose their weakness, bias and prejudice. Thus, it can also be seen that the critics really want Gandhi and Gandhian ideology to work in India for the betterment of Indians.



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Started his research activities in 1987, he presented papers in national and international conferences and seminars. Presented more than 500 papers and published more than 250 till date (2016) in the proceedings, books, journals and websites covering Sangam Tamil literature, history, astronomy, Comparative Religion, law etc.

Starting with writing “Letters to Editor”, he turned his attention towards research in 1987.

His areas of special interest are Sangam Tamil literature and Ancient Indian Arts and Sciences. He has edited two books and published two.

In 2000, he was invited by the Iranian National Commission for United Nation to present a paper, “Decoding and Decipherment of Omar Khayyam’s Rubaiyat” to commemorate 900<sup>th</sup> death anniversary of Hakim Omar Khayyam at Neshabouri, Iran. He then visited Mauritius (2001), Sri Lanka (2002) and Malaysia (2003) to present papers.

He has been a life member of Indian History Congress, South Indian History Congress, Tamilnadu History Congress, Andhrapradesh History Congress, All India Oriental Conference, Mythic Society etc. He has been an Associate Member of Institution of Engineers (India), Calcutta and General secretary of Bharatiya Itihasa Sankalana Samiti, Tamilnadu. He has been executing committee member of SIHC, TNHC etc.

He has been a visiting faculty to National Academy of Customs, Excise & Narcotics (NACEN), Chennai. After working in two industries, at present he is working as an Assistant Commissioner of Customs, Central Excise and Service Tax department.